

Sūrah 66

Al-Taḥrīm

(Prohibition)

(Madīnan Period)

Title

The expression *limā tuḥarrimu* occurs in the opening verse of this *Sūrah* and hence constitutes its title. Let it be clarified that the title (literally meaning “prohibition”) is not reflective of the contents of this *Sūrah*; rather it signifies that it contains, amid other things, the account of the prohibition of a particular item.

Period of Revelation

According to reports in *aḥādīth*, two wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him) – Ṣafīyah and Māriah the Copt are alluded to in the incident of the prohibition referred to in this *Sūrah*. The Prophet (peace be upon him) had married Ṣafīyah after the conquest of Khybar which, according to unanimous reports, occurred in the seventh year of Hijra. As to Māriah, she had been gifted to the Prophet (peace be upon him) by Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt, in the same year. She gave birth to the Prophet’s son, Ibrāhīm in the month of Dhu’l Ḥijjah of 8 AH. In view of these chronological

details, it is almost certain that this *Sūrah* must have been revealed some time during 7 or 8 AH.

Subject Matter and Themes

This is a very important *Sūrah* which, while alluding to some events related to the Prophet's respected wives, highlights the following significant points:

First, Allah alone has the absolute power to declare the bounds of the lawful and the unlawful, the permissible and the forbidden. He has not delegated this authority even to His Messenger, let alone any ordinary person. The Prophet (peace be upon him) in his capacity as a Prophet may declare something lawful or unlawful only when Allah directs him to do so, either through the directive of the Qur'ān or some subtle mode of revelation. However, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is in no way authorised to prohibit something which Allah has made lawful. As for the ordinary person, under no circumstance can he declare any such prohibition.

Second, the Prophet (peace be upon him) occupies a very delicate and lofty position in society. A minor incident in an ordinary person's life may not be of any significance, but if the same happens to the Prophet (peace be upon him), it will have its bearings on law. Accordingly, Allah watches every incident in the lives of the Prophets intensely. This is done to ensure that even a slight step may not be discordant with His will. If a Prophet ever swerves, his action is rectified immediately. This helps protect and preserve the Islamic law and its principles to ensure that it reaches mankind in pristine purity, not only through the Qur'ān, but also through the Prophet's illustrious life, which should not include anything that may not be in keeping with the Divine will.

Third, another self-evident truth emerging from this *Sūrah* is that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was reproached for his minor oversight. His momentary lapse was not only rectified but was recorded in the Qur'ān. This forcefully assures us that all actions and directives which appear in the Prophet's illustrious life, including those for which he was censured, represent the truth and are in consonance with God's will. We

may thus, with full confidence, derive guidance from the excellent example he has set.

Fourth, the Qur'ān states that Allah asks the believers to accept the honour and dignity of the illustrious Prophet (peace be upon him) as an important part of their faith, even though this *Sūrah* states that the Prophet (peace be upon him) once prohibited for himself something declared lawful by Allah to placate his wives. On the one hand, Allah the Almighty declares the respected wives of the Prophet as the mothers of the believers and asks all Muslims to hold them in great esteem. On the other, it reproves and criticises them severely in this *Sūrah* for some of their lapses. The criticism directed at the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the warning issued to his wives have not been conducted secretly, but are recorded in the Book which is and will be recited by the entire Muslim *ummah* forever. In so doing, Allah did not intend to lower their prestige in the sight of the believers; the study of this *Sūrah* has never caused a Muslim to develop any disrespect for the Prophet (peace be upon him) or his wives. The only reason therefore, for its inclusion in the Qur'ān, is that Allah seeks to instruct the believers in the norms and limits of respect for their elders and the great personalities. A prophet is a prophet; not God, that he may commit no error at all. He is respected not because he is infallible. Rather, he enjoys his exalted position for being the perfect embodiment of Allah's will. Allah did not leave him without correcting even his minor oversights. This reassures the believers that the Prophet's legacy of the role model is faithfully reflective of Divine Will. Likewise, one learns from this *Sūrah* that the Prophet's Companions and his respected wives were after all human beings. They were not angels, superhuman beings. Nor were they exempt from committing any mistake. Allah's guidance and the Prophet's training uplifted them in their ranks and made them excellent examples for mankind. Indeed, whatever respect and esteem they command, it is based on the above considerations and not on any presumption that they were infallible beings. This explains that during the Prophet's sacred life, they were immediately reprimanded whenever the Prophet's Companions and his respected wives committed any human mistake. The Prophet (peace be upon him) corrected

some of their errors whenever required, the incidents of which are recorded in several *ahādīth*. Allah Himself corrected some of the errors by mentioning these in the Qur'ān, so that Muslims may not inculcate such excessive veneration for them which could elevate them to the status of gods and goddesses. When studying the Qur'ān objectively, one comes across several instances of this nature. In its critique on the battle of Uhud, the Qur'ān tells the Companions:

Allah surely fulfilled His promise (of succour) when you were slaying them by His leave until the moment when you flagged and quarrelled among yourselves about the matter, and disobeyed (the Prophet), after He showed you what you intensely desire; for some of you sought this world and some of you sought the Next. Thereupon, to put you to a test He turned you away from your foes. Still, He pardoned you after that, for Allah is Bounteous to those who believe.

(Āl 'Imrān 3: 152)

Likewise, regarding the slander directed against the mother of the believers 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's Companions are instructed thus:

When you heard of it, why did the believing men and women not think well of their own folk and say: "This is manifest calumny?" Why did not they bring four witnesses in support of their accusation? Now that they have brought no witnesses, it is indeed they who are liars in the sight of Allah. Were it not for Allah's Bounty and His Mercy unto you in the world and in the Hereafter, a grievous chastisement would have seized you on account of what you indulged in (just think how wrong you were) when one tongue received it from another and you uttered with your mouths something you knew nothing about. You deemed it to be a trifle while in the sight of Allah it was a serious matter. And why, no sooner than you had heard it, did you not say: "It becomes us not even to utter such a thing? Holy are You (O Allah)! This is a mighty calumny." Allah admonishes you. If you are true believers, never repeat the like of what you did.

(al-Nūr 24: 12–17)

While addressing the Prophet's respected wives the Qur'ān directs them:

O Prophet, tell your wives: "If you seek the world and its embellishments, then come and I will make some provision for you and release you in an honourable way. But if you seek Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the Hereafter, then surely Allah has prepared a great reward for those of you who do good."

(al-Aḥzāb 33: 28–29)

About the Prophet's Companions, one comes across this observation in the Qur'ān:

Yet no sooner than they saw some trading or amusement, they flocked to it and left you (O Prophet) standing by yourself. Tell them: "That which is with Allah is far better than amusement and trading. Allah is the Best Provider of sustenance."

(al-Jumu'ah 62 : 11)

In *Sūrah al-Mumtaḥinah* the Prophet's Companion, Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta'ah, who participated in the Battle of Badr, is censured for leaking the Prophet's military plan to the disbelieving Quraysh before the attack on Makkah.

All the above instances feature in the Qur'ān itself; the same Qur'ān in which Allah showers praise on the Prophet's Companions and respected wives and points to their exalted rank. They have been blessed with glad tidings that they are pleased with Allah and He is pleased with them. This teaching of moderation and balance in the veneration of elders and great personalities has protected Muslims from descending into the pitfall of human worship which the Jews and Christians fell into at an earlier date. The works on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and history authored by leading Muslim scholars while recording the excellence of the Prophet's Companions and respected wives did not hesitate to mention their mistakes and weaknesses whenever they occurred. Today, there are people who claim to have greater regard for them than the classical Muslim scholars, but the latter were more well-informed and conscious

about the desirable limits of respect for the Companions and respected wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Fifth, this *Sūrah* makes it plain that Islam, being the faith prescribed by Allah, is quite candid and forthright. It allocates to everyone what he deserves in the light of his beliefs and practices. One's association with a great personality will not help him in any way. Likewise, one's relationship with an evildoer will bring him no harm if he himself does not do any wrong. Three examples of the women from the past are presented for the special attention of the Prophet's respected wives. The first one is that of the wives of the Prophets Noah and Lot (peace be upon them). Had they embraced faith and assisted their illustrious husbands in their noble work, they would have earned the same position and respect from the Muslim *Ummah* as the Prophet Muḥammad's respected wives have. However, since they acted on the contrary, their marital ties with Prophets will not avail them. They are destined to be thrown into Hell.

The second example is that of the Pharaoh's wife. Although she was the wife of Pharaoh, the worst enemy of Allah, she stood firm on faith and followed the straight path, steering away from the ways of Pharaoh and his people. Even marital ties to such a staunch disbeliever as the Pharaoh did not cause her any harm. Allah made her worthy of Paradise.

The third example is of Mary, who attained an elevated rank after being put through a severe trial by Allah. She rose to the occasion and passed the test with distinction. No chaste and noble woman other than Mary has ever been given such a severe trial. Though she was a virgin, Allah caused her to miraculously conceive a child. Mary was given her task by Allah which she accepted without any protest. Rather, as a true believer she put up with all that was concomitant with this trial. In recognition of her excellent performance, Allah bestowed upon her the title of the leader of women in Paradise, as is reported in a *ḥadīth* cited in the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad (5, 391).

In addition to the above realities, this *Sūrah* highlights another important fact, that the knowledge and guidance the Prophet (peace be upon him) acquired was not limited to the Qur'ān alone,

but he was also blessed with receiving divine guidance (*wahī*) on several issues not included in the Qur'ān. This point comes out sharply from verse 3 of this *Sūrah*:

The Prophet confided something to one of his wives and then she disclosed it (to another); so, after Allah revealed to the Prophet (that she had disclosed that secret), he made a part of it known to her and passed over a part of it. And when he told her about this [i.e. that she had disclosed the secret entrusted to her], she asked: "Who informed you of this?" He said: "I was told of it by Him Who is All-Knowing, All-Aware."

(al-Tahrīm 66: 3)

This naturally raises the question as to which Qur'ānic verse informs the Prophet (peace be upon him) that the secret entrusted by him to his wife had been disclosed by her to someone else. Since there is no Qur'ānic verse to the above effect, this is clear evidence that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to receive also divine revelation other than the Qur'ān. This forcefully refutes the standpoint of the deniers of the *ḥadīth* who allege that the Prophet (peace be upon him) never received any divine revelation other than the Qur'ān.